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[TITLE PAGE]

8 :Fry D-5 (1913) 1950 OI20 Tiwi OI20

A Bathurst Island Initiation Rite.

Sir:

000 Not many white men can have had the experience of being tried by a native court. The following story may therefore be of interest.

114 I had visited a native camp in northern Bathurst Island in March 1913, and had made the acquaintance of an adolescent native boy called Cooper. He was smeared 88| from head to foot with red ochre and wore a [301] collar made of a thin piece of wood bent [302] round his neck with the ends tied together with hair string behind with a strand of string about six inches long hanging down his back terminating in a blob of gum.

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881 He was in the *kolloponiati* stage of initiation
[301] grade and was forbidden in the camp. One day in great secrecy he showed me some bark arm bracelets known as *tuguti*. A
[114] month later I was on a Malay lugger in the same region and some natives came out to the lugger in canoes. They told me that Cooper was to take the ceremony for his next degree that afternoon. I persuaded the master of the lugger to put me ashore on Papiau beach, opposite old Fort Dundas.
123 The natives were unwilling to take me with them at first, but finally consented. We walked inland for about four miles and met the main group, all painted for the ceremony. Cooper was said to be out in the mangroves, but came in shortly after about midday. He then went out again for a sugar bag. Having learned a few words of the language I attempted conversation. After a time I attempted to ask something about Cooper's *tuguti*. Immediately the cheerful group about me hushed and everyone seemed very concerned. They had gained the impression that I had stolen the *tuguti*. I tried to explain that I had only looked at them. About twenty of the men seated themselves in a circle and proceeded to discuss the problem. I overheard a few recognizable words at times, *ardjidit waitamanna*, no good white men, *paltoa*, dead, *yergobai*, alligator. I was sitting meanwhile with my back to a pandanus facing a salt water inlet. An emissary from the circle visited me from time to time and questioned me anxiously about what I had done with the *tuguti*. One humourist came over several times, tapped me on the shoulder, and grinningly pointed to the water, saying *yergobai*. Suddenly the discussion stopped, everybody stood up, and cordial relations were resumed as if nothing had happened.

881 Cooper returned about 4 p.m. He washed
[313] and was smeared all over with red ochre except the upper part of the face. Mean-

881 while a small trestle had been built of three upright sticks about 2 ft. 6 in. high in the [343] form of an isosceles triangle, with the apex to the west. Cross sticks were laid across the top of this and the sticks covered with grass. Three old men then took Cooper to a point about twenty yards east of the trestle and faced towards it, two on his right, one on his left. They each held a [411] flat bladed club, *irruella*, in the left hand horizontally above the head and beat the [533] point of it with a light round club with a pointed end, *merkunga*. Cooper held three *merkunga* in the crook of his left arm, one being taken and used by one of the old men. The old men advanced towards the trestle, chanting and beating their clubs in the way described. Cooper was slightly behind them. Young men followed the group. Cooper stood before the trestle as at an altar while the old men chanted for about five minutes. Water was called for, and brought by a woman and given to a visitor from the Mugula tribe. He then poured the water over Cooper's head. Cooper rubbed his belly with his *merkunga*. The visitor then pulled the hair string free from one end of the wooden collar, *eladini*, while Cooper made very wry faces. The collar was removed and the ceremony ended. I was [439] presented with Cooper's *eladini* and *merkunga* in return for gifts, and I was cheerfully escorted back to the beach where the lugger was waiting for me.

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